

Interviewer: Unidentified
Interviewee: Mary Bowen Caputo
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Pender County Oral History Project

Mary Bowen Caputo

Mrs. Caputo reflects on her trips throughout the world and the various locations that her husband was deployed at. While also sharing fond memories about her childhood and what it was like growing up in one large family in Pender County, North Carolina. In her interview, Mrs. Caputo emphasizes happiness and avoiding negative habits like smoking, contributing it to her longevity and the key to living a long and fulfilling life.

Topics discussed include Pender County history, Family life, Genealogy, Women's history, Military families, Childhood memories, and Communication and technology.

Interviewer: 2016, and I am here talking to Mary Moe [?] Caputo, and Mary, could you tell us your age and where you live?

[00:00:16]

Mary Bowen Caputo: I'm ninety-four, and I live in downtown Burgaw on [British Street?].

[00:00:23]

Interviewer: And could you tell us a little bit about your family?

[00:00:28]

Caputo: I'm married to a Marine. Once a Marine, always a Marine. My husband, Anthony Caputo—once a Marine, always a Marine. I have a daughter, Catherine Herc [?], who lives in Chapel Hill, and she is running a store. She owns a store that her—imports. A son Robert Anthony Caputo, who worked for National Geographic for many years, now he's freelancing, he's doing other things. You want my—

[00:01:03]

Interviewer: And who were your parents, Mary?

[00:01:05]

Caputo: My parents were Stewart Ban Bowen from Burgaw. He was born in Duplin County, but he moved to Pender when he was about two years old. My mother was Catherine Buford Bowen, she was born in Richmond Virginia, mother lived to be a hundred. They came to Burgaw—they moved around many, many times, but they ended up in Burgaw on a farm that my father, my grandfather, John Wright Bowen—who was a Civil War veteran, had fought in the 1880s. Many of the Bowens grew up there and at one time, it was called Bowen town, but really, it's the Stony Run area of Burgaw.

[00:01:57]

Interviewer: And how many brothers and sisters did you have Mary?

[00:02:00]

Caputo: I had five brothers, but three of them died before I was born, so I really grew up with two older brothers.

[00:02:12]

Interviewer: And what were their names?

[00:02:13]

Caputo: My brothers were Frank Buford, who was named for my mother's oldest brother, who died at the age of 17. And my other brother was Stuart [Van?] Bowling Jr, always called Stuart.

[00:02:27]

Interviewer: And you were the only girl.

[00:02:29]

Caputo: The only girl, the last of six children, and only girl.

[00:02:35]

Interviewer: Hm, where have you lived in your travels with your husband, besides Burgaw?

[00:02:39]

Caputo: Well, all over. A number of Marine Corps bases, Quantico Virginia, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Washington DC, we lived also in Hawaii, which was a wonderful duty station. And we also had three years in Sweden, when my husband was attached to the embassy in Stockholm?

[00:03:03]

Interviewer: What was your favorite place to live? And why?

[00:03:06]

Caputo: We lived in so many wonderful places, my husband had wonderful duty. We're very fortunate in place where he was assigned. But I guess Sweden was really my favorite place. We were there three years, and we were able to travel extensively.

[00:03:26]

Interviewer: Kinda could up there be though?

[00:03:30]

Caputo: Well, you get used to it. Know that everything is adjusted to that. So it was a [unclear]—

[00:03:38]

Interviewer: What kind of memories—what pleasant memories stand out from your childhood in Burgaw?

[00:03:44]

Caputo: Being part of a very large family. My father was one of 12 children. Several of the brothers moved to Florida, but there were four brothers who stayed in a part of Pender County, just outside of Burgaw. That was the farm that my grandfather had built. And my—I had so many cousins, actually, I had forty-seven first cousins. Forty-two who were named Bowen. But in my family, there—were we live in stony run, the section of Pender County that is sometimes called Bowenville—there was a girl in each of four families, and we were close in age and devoted friends as long as—as most of them lived, I’m the only one left now.

[00:04:41]

Unidentified Speaker: And can you tell us a few things about Burgaw, about school in Burgaw, or things you especially remember about living in Burgaw and when you were younger?

[00:04:51]

Caputo: I lived in Burgaw until I was five years old, then we moved back to the farm just outside of Burgaw. I can remember riding the school bus, and what fun it was just seeing our friends every day. We came through town to school. We had a beautiful school building that was built about—it was in the early 1920s. Two story brick building with a magnificent auditorium, which was where everything produced in Burgaw was held. The school was well run, there was no problem with discipline in those days. The principles word was the law. And we had good teachers, excellent teachers, and one thing that stands out, in my memory, is that most of the teachers came to Burgaw in boarding. There were several boarding houses, and most—several of them had never seen the ocean until they came to Burgaw. And we are just right up—near the coast in Burgaw.

[00:06:04]

Unidentified Speaker: Who is your favorite teacher?

[00:06:05]

Caputo: No question about it! My favorite teacher from first grade all the way through college was Bright Hefner, my fourth-grade teacher.

[00:06:16]

Unidentified Speaker: And why, what made her special?

[00:06:18]

Caputo: I don’t know why she was so special. She was—I think this was her first year of teaching. She was from Greensboro and I’m not sure, but I assume that she had gone to UNC Greensboro or Greensboro college. This was her first teaching assignment, and there was something just, I don’t know what it was about her. But she was an inspirational teacher, kind, pleasant, very friendly, didn’t put up with any mischief, but just a good teacher and inspired a lot of children there.

[00:07:02]

Unidentified Speaker: What are your special interests or hobbies?

[00:07:06]

Caputo: Well, I'm getting a little too old to have any hobbies anymore, but genealogy has been one of my special interests for years. And I'm very interested in the Pender County Museum and preserving, what we can, of Pender's past.

[00:07:26]

Unidentified Speaker: What, in your opinion, is your greatest concern for the future?

[00:07:33]

Caputo: Decency, we have lost all sense of kindness, helpfulness—just being good neighbors to everybody we meet. Things have changed so much since I was a child, I don't recognize the world anymore.

[00:07:54]

Unidentified Speaker: I agree. What do you believe to be the greatest invention of your lifetime? From your personal standpoint.

[00:08:02]

Caputo: There are so many things that are new and different when you realize how old I am. Radio was brand new when I was a child, I can remember one man had a radio and people in Burgaw went out to his farm to hear this magnificent invention that had sound waves. People talking coming through the air, no such thing had ever existed before, but I don't know—I think communication has probably changed more than anything else in my lifetime.

[00:08:40]

Unidentified Speaker: Do you think all of that—those advances in communication have had a negative effect or a positive effect on the way people are?

[00:08:49]

Caputo: I really don't know. I think we know too much—people can read—there's no privacy anymore. There used to be a time when your secrets were your secrets. But now, if your mouth, whatever you say can be broadcast all over the world.

[00:09:10]

Unidentified Speaker: Exactly. What do you think is the value of studying genealogy and knowing genealogy?

[00:09:17]

Caputo: It's fun. It is such a nice thing to do, and people who are interested in genealogy, or in my opinion, are always nice—they're friendly. They're delighted to share what they found out with you, and it's just a wonderful thing to do. We—if we don't know our past, I don't know how we can be prepared for the future.

[00:09:43]

Unidentified Speaker: Exactly, anything else you'd like to comment on? Anything special about—what do you—let me ask you one more question. What do you contribute your longevity to?

[00:09:58]

Caputo: I don't smoke [laughs].

[00:10:02]

Unidentified Speaker: That helps [laughs]. And you said your mom was hundred wasn't she?

[00:10:07]

Caputo: Mhm

[00:10:08]

Unidentified Speaker: Your genes

[00:10:10]

Caputo: [unclear]—

[00:10:12]

Unidentified Speaker: Your genes and partly your genes

[00:10:16]

Caputo: Yea, I am sure it is my genes. But I really and truly think that it's —well being happy, I guess I was born happy and I'm still happy. There are things that are not always the way I wish they were, but I try to look on the positive side, and ah, that's it.

[00:10:34]

Unidentified Speaker: Thank you so much, Mary.